

THE ASYLUM

Quarterly Journal of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society

Volume V, No. 2 Summer, 1987

Inside:

GEORGE FREDERICK KOLBE, our President and “host with the most,” provides us with “An Introduction to the Fascinating World of Numismatic Literature,” beginning on page 9

CARLING GRESHAM has written an article about research — or shooting craps. Find out which by reading “Research: Necessity, Curiosity and a Roll of the Dice . . .” on page 10

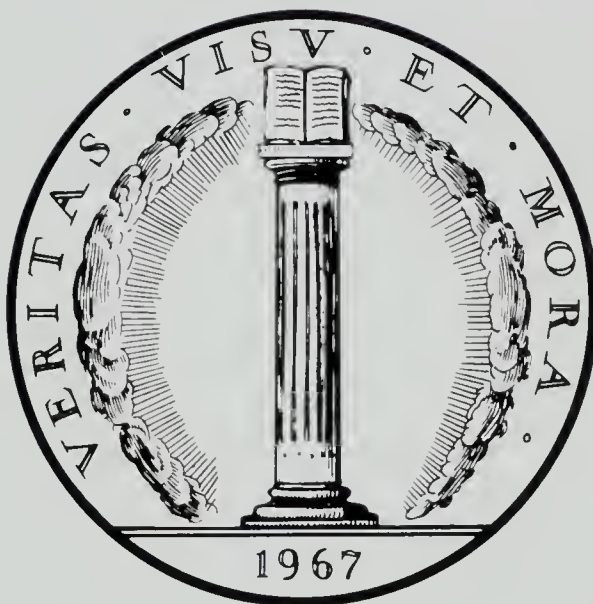
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

FAREWELL MESSAGE

The past two years have been momentous ones for the Numismatic Bibliomania Society. Revived by immediate past-president Cal Wilson and his fellow officers, NBS has grown and flourished. Carling Gresham brought new life to *The Asylum* and our current editor, Joel Orosz, has it brimming with vitality.

At our business meeting last year, the NBS Board unanimously decided to request a club booth at the 1987 American Numismatic Association Convention in Atlanta (volunteers are needed to man the booth and additional information regarding this worthwhile project will be found elsewhere in this issue). It was also decided that an NBS writer's award be created and presented annually to the author of the best article appearing in *The Asylum*. The Armand Champa Award will be presented for the first time at our annual meeting in Atlanta on August 26th, 1987.

The only real cloud on our horizon is financial. Before the end of the year we will be emulating our Federal Government. Hopefully, our booth on the ANA Midway this August, and the recruiting efforts of members will secure many new recruits. If not, the ante will likely be a bit more when dues-paying time comes around. Save yourself a few bucks and convince a fellow bibliophile to join our group.

Response to the straw poll regarding the name of our organization and its publication has been sparse, so a section has been added to the election ballots being sent with this issue where you may indicate your preference. Personally, it seems to me that the name of our organization and its publication should be offensive to no one. The present names certainly reflect the sometimes irrational though often enjoyable acquisitive compulsions of many of our members. Yes, forming a numismatic library can be fun. But what of other benefits that can be derived? Should not dissemination of useful information be a paramount concern? As stated in the first issue of *The Asylum*, "the purpose (of NBS) will be several fold: We will, hopefully, enlighten, inform, and entertain." Should not our name reflect also the more serious aspects of collecting numismatic literature, and even if nine of ten bibliophiles like our current name would it not be better if all ten found our name acceptable?

The past two years have been very busy ones for me, both personally and professionally. Time spent on NBS affairs has been limited and I would personally like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the Society. Special thanks are due fellow officers and board members, particularly Alan Meghriq who has assumed duties far beyond the scope of his office. Board member Cal Wilson was also especially helpful. In our group, it's the Editor who really does all the work. Thanks, Carling and Joel. Finally, without writers for our journal, our society would not exist. Thanks to all who have contributed and an exhortation to all who have not to do so soon.

From the Editor

The "keeps" are ahead! As of Saturday, May 9, this is the tally of the Straw Poll: Keep the names: 7; Change the Names: 3. Since responses are still coming in, the results will not be announced until the Autumn issue.

It seems clear that there is a support both for keeping and for changing the names. It

will be interesting to see if this two-to-one split holds until all the votes are in. For details on the great controversy, see the "Letters to the Editor" section.

The first rule of publishing is to never admit that you have lots of manuscripts on hand. Sure enough, since your editor indiscreetly admitted that fact in this space of the Spring issue, not a single manuscript has come in. We still have a lot of material on hand, but not so much that we can afford complacency. We continue to look for more articles in the vein of Dave Bowers' fine contribution of the last number: that is, reminiscences of numismatics in years past. A review of the new third edition of the A.N.A. grading guide will also be thankfully received. So start scribbling everyone!

Not with a Bang, but a Whimper Dept. — No bids were received for *The Asylum* page proofs. Lot withdrawn!

PREVIEWS OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

"The Saga of the West: The Tokens of Matt Warner" by Harry F. Campbell

"Revisiting the Early 1950's, Part II" by Q. David Bowers

Review of *Numismatics: Witness to History* by Randolph Zander

"Numismatic Match Game" by A. Scurrilous Rumor

And . . . An entirely new regular feature!

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

1. A well-balanced issue! I hope we may attract enough new members to support the 32p. format. Your point about proportionately too much overhead in the 16p. version states the problem perfectly.
2. I would vote to keep the current names. A touch of panache does no harm; and I do not favor those outfits and periodicals that keep retreading.

Randolph Zander
Alexandria, Virginia

To the Editor:

I appreciate your solicitation of comments regarding the names of the organization and the journal. I think that some people automatically take too seriously anything proffered in a purely light-hearted vein. I have no objection to the whimsical nature of either name; my only adverse comment would be that the title *The Asylum* is not really descriptive out of context.

I am reminded of another publication of a couple of decades back: the Ancient Coin Club of America's *The Voice of the Turtle*, a charming literary non-sequitur, with their symbol of the Aegina "Turtle," (a true Chelonian). This name was eventually changed to the far more erudite *North American Journal of Numisamtics*. Not long afterward, the publication expired (not necessarily *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*!).

After re-reading this, I am not sure I answered the question. My vote is not to change either name for the sake of change; if a truly superior and descriptive name is found to evoke broad support — fine, change it.

William Malkmus
La Mesa, California

To the Editor:

Re. the straw poll on *The Asylum* and the *Numismatic Bibliomania Society*, please

keep those names! They fit!

L. Miles Raisig, Ph.D.
Laurinburg, North Carolina

Editor's note: Welcome aboard, Dr. R.!

To the Editor:

CHANGE IT! Both "Asylum" and "Bibliomania" may be O.K. for us real nuts, but we want a wider appeal than just to the "hard core".

Keep the initials, "N.B.S." if possible — such as Numismatic *Book* Society or Numismatic Bibliophilic Society.

The journal's name is more difficult. "The Alcove" (such as in a library — too sedate). "Numismatic Bibliophilic Review" (too stuffy). "Numismatic Bookshelf" — maybe there should be a naming contest.

Kirby Brown, Ph.D.
Stockton, California

To the Editor:

As a charter "bibliomaniac" I read with great interest the latest issue of *The Asylum*. Boo and hiss to all fuddy duddies like Q. David, and unfortunately yourself, who would consider renaming our organization and our journal. This has been argued and discussed from Vol. 1. There is nothing wrong with being a little bit nuts about numismatic literature, and the day that I cannot laugh at myself over my many and varied interests I will quit. Chalk up one vote for KEEP IT.

Also, being basically frugal, I will do my best to bring others into the fold so we can keep the fine *Asylum* in its current size without a dues increase. Keep up your fine efforts.

J. Richard Becker
Acton, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

Keep it!

Joseph E. Boling
Reston, Virginia

To the Editor:

Please *don't change the name!* I'm happy as a clam in *The Asylum!*

Wayne Homren
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

To the Editor:

In reference to changing the name of our journal, I vote to change it.

The name "Bibliomania", sounds too much like a novelty shop, and the present name of our journal connotes the obvious. It never has bothered me though, perhaps because I have associated the name with the great work you and the others have put into it. I think the name should be changed so that potential members will give it a chance.

How about the name, "Numismabib"? I think of it as a lively merger of Numismatics and Bibliomania. Or, how about using the N.B.S. initials with a symbolic background?

I enjoy the Numismatic Bibliomania Society's Journal, whatever it is called, and I believe many more would appreciate it, if only they knew about it.

Suppose we should add a centerfold?

Dean S. Neff
Greenville, Ohio

Editor's note: With regard to your last idea, we had better ask Armand — he has been renting it lately!

To the Editor:

I'm a new member of N.B.S. but I agree with you and Dave Bowers that it's time to re-title The Asylum and the Society. If the organization is renamed, I think it would be useful to come up with a name that could still be abbreviated to N.B.S.

As for the journal's financial problems, I sent Alan Meghrig a little extra with my 1987 dues to help N.B.S. I have also ordered all the back issues.

Robert L. Brownell, Jr.
San Simeon, California

Editor's note: Welcome to the fold, Bob, and thanks for supporting the N.B.S. above and beyond the call of duty.'

To the Editor:

I am responding to the question about changing the name of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society and its publication, *The Asylum*. At this time I am in favor of keeping both names as they are.

It is difficult to respond to a choice between a known name and an unspecified new name. It is possible that a new name might be proposed that I would support. However, I doubt it. There may be those who prefer four letter words to words with four syllables. They might enjoy belonging to the "Coin Book Club".

I also am responding to comments about increasing membership numbers in order to hold down the cost of membership. I have stuck with NBS through times of unfilled promises and erratic publication schedules. I never accepted the explanation that we were getting four issues a year when they came two at a time. Calling an issue a double issue doesn't impress me. I am not surprised that half of our original membership has drifted away. I hope that a good product will bring some of them back and attract new members as well. I believe that the key to increasing membership is to have something good to offer. This has not been true in the past. What I have seen in the past couple of issues gives me hope.

I have only been able to attend two of the NBS meetings at ANA. I believe these are also important for promoting membership. Regional meetings at major shows might help. Adding a literature classification for numismatic display competition might help.

I wonder if there is a way to get the newsletter down a little closer to the level of the average member. The EAC newsletter, *Penny-Wise*, has free ads for members to offer a few items for sale. In *Asylum* the ads are from the large dealers. How does the "little guy" sell off a few duplicates or indicate an interest in finding some obscure reference? As a writer I would like to be able to request research assistance. There are a couple of examples of that in this issue. I think this sort of thing will help promote the organization.

I have rambled on beyond the original intent of the letter. Keep the names!

Pete Smith
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Editor's note: We are always happy to print legitimate requests for research help free of charge. We also offer classified ads at a nominal rate of ten cents per word, although lately not many folks have been placing them.

NUMISMATIC BIBLIOMANIA SOCIETY NEWS

N.B.S. ELECTION

Enclosed in this issue is the official ballot of the 1987 election for officers and trustees of the NBS. Please exercise your right to choose your leaders. You will notice that there is also a space on the ballot to note your preference on the great debate

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regarding keeping or changing our names. We simply did not receive enough votes in the straw poll to guide the Board's decision, either to change or to stand pat.

In light of recent national events, your crusading editor has staked out the homes of randomly-selected candidates, and can report with certainty that none are carrying on with Donna Rice!

N.B.S. ANNUAL MEETING SET

Speaking of the Annual Meeting, you might want to know the date and time. Our annual conclave will be held, as always, during the ANA Anniversary Convention, on Wednesday, August 26th, 1987 at 8 p.m. in room number 265/266 of the Georgia World Congress Center. The program will consist of a color slide presentation by Armand Champa, highlighting some of the better books in his superb numismatic library. Alan Grace, the master binder who is responsible for some of the fine bindings in Armand's collection, will assist Armand in his presentation.

In addition to the presentation to the first winner of the Armand Champa award, the results of the NBS election and the straw poll on the names will be announced. As always, there will be plenty of insulting repartee before, during and after the official meeting. Plan to attend! Bring some books!

FIRST NBS WRITER'S AWARD

The first NBS writers award, for the best article published in *The Asylum* during each calendar year will — may we have the envelope please — be presented at the N.B.S. Annual Meeting during the ANA convention. The idea to honor our best came from the fertile mind of Carling Gresham, and has been perpetually endowed by Armand Champa. It will consist of a handsome wall plaque, and in honor of Armand's generosity, the Board has dubbed it "The Armand Champa Award". Indefatigable bibliophile Randolph Zander was chosen to select and chair a committee to judge the articles of 1986. Ran chose Nancy Green and Leo Guibault to be his committee, and meeting in great secrecy, they have made their decision. Join us in Atlanta to discover who won . . .

MIDWAY MADNESS

At each ANA convention, a section of the bourse is reserved for numismatic specialty clubs to allow them to promote themselves. This year, for the first time, the NBS has one. This is a golden opportunity to recruit the additional members that we so desperately need. But we need you! We need members to man the booth, exhibit their favorite books, waylay unsuspecting numismatists, share a sample copy of *The Asylum*, put an application form into their hands, and browbeat 'em 'till they sign up! Sound like fun? If so, please drop George Kolbe a note ASAP, being careful to note the days and times that you are willing to work. Glass display cases will be provided, and your books need only be displayed while you are manning the booth. In order to be effective we need to cover the booth 100% of the time. The Convention hours are as follows:

Wednesday, August 26, 1987	11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursday, August 27, 1987	12 noon to 7 p.m.
Friday, August 28, 1987	12 noon to 8 p.m.
Saturday, August 29, 1987	9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Sunday, August 30, 1987	10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FASCINATING WORLD OF NUMISMATIC LITERATURE

George Frederick Kolbe
Crestline, California

Editor's note: This is a modified version of George's speech at 1986 ANA Educational Forum.

Literally millions of different kinds of coins have been manufactured over the past 3000 years. Untold numbers of medals, orders and decorations, tokens, paper currency, primitive and other media of exchange have also been produced. All have come to be classified under the heading of "numismatics". many people, however, including even veteran coin collectors, are unaware of the vast body of numismatic literature that has been written to interpret and classify these items.

When I first started selling numismatic literature on a full-time basis, I soon came to dread the inevitable question of a new acquaintance: "Well, what do you do for a living, George?" At first I would respond, "I buy and sell rare and out of print numismatic books." That was a mistake. Even if the new acquaintance knew the meaning of "numismatic," you could usually tell from the skeptical look in his eye that he was thinking, "surely there can't be more than a handful of old books written on coins. Old George must be starving." Sometimes it was worse. The new acquaintance didn't know the meaning of "numismatic." As soon as I mentioned the word "coins," I instantly became a coin dealer. After all, how could anyone make a living selling a few musty books about coins? Sometimes, it got even worse. Two years after I began selling numismatic books full-time, my wife kicked me out of the house. When even our living room became an "Alice in Wonderland" garden maze (the garden maze being comprised of ever-growing bookshelves) it became time to find an office. A suitable space was soon found but the leasing agent seemed to be hesitant. Taking me aside, he asked in a low voice: "These books you're selling about numismatics," (I hardly need mention that he horribly mispronounced the word "numismatics"), "these books, they're not . . . uh . . . dirty books are they?"

Well, I'm here tonight to let you know that there are lots and lots of numismatic books, and that relatively few of them are dirty. To give you an idea of the size and scope of the literature of numismatics, let us consider but one facet: ancient numismatics. If one wished to possess a complete library of works on ancient numismatics, several hundred feet of shelf space and several thousand dollars would be required. Those of you who have visited the American Numismatic Association Library in Colorado Springs know that there are lots of coin books. The Library occupies over 2000 square feet and there is some 3000 linear feet of shelf space and that space is almost entirely filled.

In 1962, the G.K. Hall publishing company added the American Numismatic Society to its program of issuing catalogues of specialized libraries, and 110,000 cross-referenced file cards in the society's catalogue were reproduced in six oversized volumes with an additional volume devoted to the 15,000 file cards of auction catalogues. Subsequently, three supplements were issued, with over 60,000 additional file reproduced. Eliminating cross-referenced titles, it is safe today, I think, to say the A.N.S. Library houses nearly 100,000 different numismatic publications. Now, the Society has arguably the best numismatic library in the world, but its holdings are

certainly not complete.

Where did this all start? *George's article will be continued in the next issue . . .*

RESEARCH: Necessity, Curiosity, and a Roll of the Dice . . .

Carling Gresham
Pomona Park, Florida

One of the Mizner boys said it: "If you steal from one author it's plagiarism, but if you steal from many, it's research." Doubtless, there are many thieves among us . . . in ALL walks of life. However, in defense of those writers who "... steal from many," I would like to offer two rhetorical questions, both of which are pertinent to this essay.

(1) How many people do you know who have had an *original* idea, and made it public knowledge? (Do not confuse *methods* with *ideas*, and ask yourself if ALL ideas have been used). I like to think that those of us who "steal" are not thieves at all, but collators; e.g., different points of information about a subject are published by 20 authors from 10 points on the globe in 5 languages. (2) Is it theft to coalesce these different facts and opinions into a whole, new article, and to present it, with proper credits, as one's own work?

Have you ever wondered how much of "modern civilization" is the result of chance alone? *What* started the Wright brothers thinking that they could fly? Man did not *need* to fly, so the work was not necessary; their first flight had to be a combination of curiosity and luck. What about that lost, forgotten fellow who built the first wheel? Was it necessity, curiosity or just plain luck? How about the one who developed the common handplow blade? Or, the one who developed the screw? The list is endless, inexhaustible.

This brief article hardly relates to any necessity of mankind, but it is written to suggest that much of our successful research, regardless of the discipline, is due to curiosity and a roll of the dice . . . luck. The following examples of luck are basically true, however, "literary license," i.e., I can lie a lot, has been taken with one. Names have been changed to protect the innocent. *The innocent will be revealed next time . . .*

T'is the good reader that makes the good book.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Last Word

In early April, your editor received some information relating to the unfortunate Kurt Krueger — A.N.A. affair. The information itself was not extraordinary — all of it was in the public domain — but the way we received it certainly was. No cover letter was included. The envelope had no return address; it was postmarked from Chicago. Our address was typed on a xerox label, which suggests that the letter was part of a large mailing to several numismatic publications. Just above the label, in large red letters, was stamped the single word, "IMPORTANT".

"Important" this subject is, but "in" it does not go, for a very simple reason. We firmly believe that *The Asylum* must be an open forum for controversy, but that controversy must not be between "Mr. X" and "Mr. Y". If you have something controversial to say, you must have the courage and the integrity to sign your name to it. That is our policy.

We do accept pseudonyms, of course, for contributions that are purely educational or entertaining; after all, I doubt if anyone believes that there really is a bibliophile out there named "A. Scurrilous Rumor". But if you want to attack someone or something — which muck we *love* to rake! — sign your name or your submission will never be set in type. Around here, we do things conversely from Zenith: "the name goes on before the quality goes in."

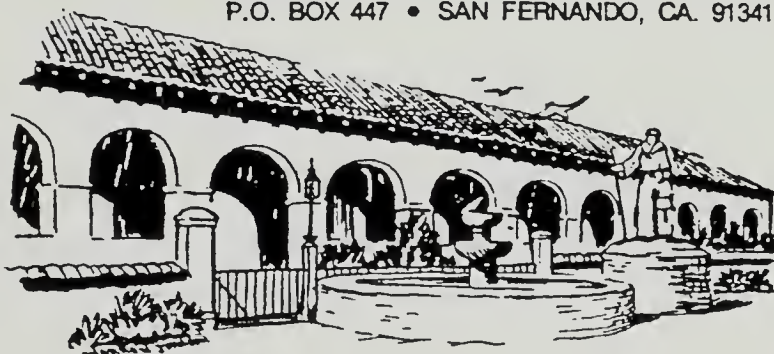
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